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NOTES ON 29 MARCH 1975 DELTA SWING

- I. Major
Session with/General Nguyen Khoa Nam (Commander of MR-4)
Brigadier
and/General Tran Van Hai (Commander of the 7th Division)

In this session, General Nam did virtually all of the talking with General Hai remaining /circumspectly silent in the presence of his corps commander unless asked a direct question. Nam was duly anxious to make a good impression on his American visitors, but he stuck very close to the party line and said nothing that could have caused him the least difficulty if it were reported back to President Thieu. In the terms of general strategy, his thought on the line needed to cope with the present situation was a twofold suggestion that the GVN, with American support, should (1) ensure that the 1973 Paris agreements were implemented, and (2) mount a counteroffensive in North Vietnam. The former is a legitimate concern. Mr. Shackley and I tried gently to point out the unrealism of the latter but with little success. Although the General talked in terms of ARVN action or, slightly more realistically, VNAF raids, what he had in mind almost certainly was U.S. aerial attacks.

On other points of detail, the General covered the following partly on his own initiative but largely in response to questions from either Mr. Shackley or myself:

- He is very concerned about the introduction of armor into MR-4. Tanks do not trouble him as much as APCs, which can maneuver across rice paddies.
- 80% of the communist forces in the delta are NVA, according to him.
- His forces have a number of critical equipment shortages. There has been a 91% reduction in M79 grenade launchers; his 105 pieces are limited to four rounds per day; his 155s to two rounds per day, and his helicopters for command and control cannot fly more than one hour per day.
- He is trying to upgrade regional and popular forces and integrate them into ARVN units to flesh out his troop

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strength which is now down to 300-man battalions.

(In response to questions, it is clear that desertions are a significant problem but not one he particularly cared to discuss with American visitors.)

- The General claimed the communists now have more regular regiments than he does.
- GVN MR-4 forces can basically hold their own under present circumstances but even one more North Vietnamese division in the region would have serious consequences as would the loss of one of the present GVN divisions, e.g., by transfer to MR-3.

In response to Mr. Shackley's rejoinders and mine, the General backed off from the "attack North Vietnam" theme but did stress the urgency and importance of the United States taking a role to insist that the Paris agreements were implemented. He made the point - unfortunately valid - that in our discussions with the GVN in late 1972 and early 1973 we had promised to react quickly if the agreements were violated. Left unsaid, but clearly there, was the thought that we had failed to meet that promise. The General professed to be grimly determined with respect to the future and, although he did not voice much optimism, he did indicate that so far as he was concerned there are only two alternatives: the South Vietnamese army and people would live in freedom or die under communist domination. There could be no further retreats, certainly in the delta.

General Hai, with considerable emotion apparent, said that if the United States could not provide additional aid he hoped we would at least refrain from announcing that fact to the communists for such an announcement would be a great impetus to further communist adventurism and would have a disastrous present effect on GVN morale. As Hai put it, "We fight lonely and desperate If we die, we will be killed half by the communists and half by the American people."

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II. Session with Colonel Nhan Van Thiet (Commander of the MR-4 National Police)

Colonel Thiet is a round-faced, almost boyish officer with what are fairly excellent political connections. He was once the commander of the presidential guard and is apparently Mrs. Thieu's adopted son. He was engaging though probably not totally candid in his coverage of some of the more delicate topics which arose during our discussion. The session was handled via an interpreter, although Colonel Thiet obviously understands some English because he broke in from time to time to provide an answer before the question had been translated. During the session, he made the following points, largely in response to questions:

- There has been no apparent change from the pattern of communist activity during the last two months.
- The forces in MR-4 are now approximately balanced, but the GVN would be hard pressed if there were any augmentation of communist strength or diminution in the forces available to ARVN.
- When asked about VC cadre (in light of the problems they have had over the past decade in the delta after they stripped their best cadre in 1965 to officer main force units), Thiet said the VC were trying to send back good cadre to the delta but they were being neutralized by effective police action. The VC attempt to upgrade their cadre was still not successful.
- The VC were endeavoring to engage in sapper action but so far this had been thwarted(?) by police action.
- In response to a question on whether the communists were attempting to spread propaganda exploiting recent events in MRs-1 and 2 and foster rumors, Colonel Thiet said rumors were circulating but were not yet effective because the people still believed MR-4 would be quiet.
- The subject of the Hoa Hao came up. Colonel Thiet was rather proud of the fact that he had personally arrested

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the Hoa Hao leader, ~~on~~ Hai Tap , by inviting him to lunch. Thiet clearly did not relish discussing the Hoa Hao in any detail and, when asked why the Hoa Hao units constituted a problem, his response, slightly lame, was that the Hoa Hao were recruiting draft dodgers and encouraging ARVN soldiers to desert.

- He claimed the civilian population's morale was good.
- After Mr. Shackley had outlined his understanding of the GVN's overall strategy, he repeated the litany heard from all of our MR-4 contacts - that the situation in the delta would remain fine unless the communists sent in one or more additional divisions.
- His major problems in MR-4 all revolved around eliminating the VCI and equipment shortages which made it difficult for him to discharge his task.)

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 > These three were particularly important:

- a. The area was crisscrossed with canals and rivers used by the communists for traffic in personnel and supplies to and from the GVN and VC areas. Police riverine forces have been very successful in interdicting this traffic, but their success was being adversely affected by lack of spare parts and replacements for boats.
- b. Police were increasingly short of communications equipment and spare parts for same. They had received none for the last two years. (FM-1, FA-5, SA-100)
- c. Police are short of ammunition, particularly for pistol, carbine, M16 and grenades.

Once again another session closed on a plea for help with the theme that the GVN had manpower and morale but were short of resources and needed physical aid that had been promised.

III. Session with Colonel Mach Van Truong (Commander of the 21st ARVN Division)

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Colonel Truong was well-educated by MACV and gave in Vietnamese a very polished, set MACV-type briefing. In it, and in response to questions raised, he covered the following points:

- The 4th^{NVA} Division area of operations encompassed roughly the communist MR-9 (Colonel Truong made a point, valid, of the fact that Hanoi had all of ~~North~~ Vietnam from the China border to Ca Mau (sp[✓]?) organized into nine consecutive military regions.
- In August 1974, ^{the} communists formed the 4th Division in the lower delta and instituted a program of upgrading their regiments; assigned a fourth battalion to the former three in each regiment.
- The communists also were trying to upgrade their district and local level units with the objective of having a provincial mobile battalion and a district and local force battalion in every one of their districts. n
- The communists have also done a considerable amount of weapons modernization and upgrading (14.5 AAA, 82mm recoilless rifles, Chicom automatic rifles. Much of this equipment was brand new and some of the weapons and ammunition recently captured bore 1974 manufacturers' date stamps.) (This needs to be looked into. If true, this has political significance but, even more, it indicates that aid delivered to North Vietnam is being passed through promptly to the forces in the south, which has not been ^a traditional practice. In the past, forces in the south have tended to operate off of stockpiles developed well in advance of operations.)
- Colonel Truong spent considerable time elaborating on enemy plans for an attack on Can Tho from two directions with a simulated diversionary attack on Rach Gia. He was a little vague on his evidence and said that the attack was scheduled to be launched on 1 April; communist forces had supplies in hand; and the nights would be moonless at that time.

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- In the troop strength discussion, he said his battalions were down to an average of 300 men as against a TO&E strength of 800.
- In outlining the 21st's problems, he stressed the following:
 - a. Fire support. He had no pre-strike support. His L19s could only fly two hours per day, and they often had to be used for adjusting artillery, precluding their use as fighters.
 - b. Artillery is limited to four rounds per day on 105s and two rounds per day on 155s.
 - c. Grenades. He could use only 3,000 per month and since there were approximately 10,000 men in his division that meant that every three men would use one grenade a month.
 - d. On M16 ammunition, he was limited to 900,000 rounds per month which made approximately 85 rounds per month per soldier.
 - e. On .50 caliber ammunition, he was limited to 30,000 rounds per month, which meant 115 .50 caliber guns could only fire 210 rounds per month.
 - f. He had a great deal of difficulty with helicopters being severely limited in the time they could fly. As an example of the problem this caused, he cited a recent operation where he had had to deploy a regiment for three days taking 3 KIA and 6 WIA to get 10 bags of rice and some small arms to two battalions on an operation. This regimental activity would have been unnecessary if he had had available helicopter time to handle the supply.
 - g. Morale in his troops was down because of lack of quick reaction and shortages of ammunition. (The enemy had very strong firepower and possibly would be able to use ammunition for troops not having any tank weapons.) Unit for unit the GVN forces were outgunned.
 - h. This equipment disadvantage increased his casualty

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rates, which in turn increased his desertion rates.

Both casualties and desertions would be lower if he were not at such an equipment disadvantage.

I asked whether the communists were not faced with problems in light of the fact that the bulk of their troops were North Vietnamese. Colonel Truong acknowledged that they were but then slid this off to further equipment aid. The communists moved supplies by sampan down the waterways and ^{he} could interdict them if he had helicopter time to interdict. In conclusion, the standard litany of appeal for aid was made by Colonel Truong.

IV. General Comment

In all of the discussion with these ARVN commanders one thing came through very clearly:

, The ARVN is still hampered by something which could be termed "psychological dependence." The ARVN is reluctant to face or cope with leadership or management decisions and subconsciously expects that the United States will somehow fill the void and pick up the burden in a way that will free senior ARVN command levels from the necessity of making hard and unpleasant decisions. The ARVN is clearly reluctant to engage the enemy without a personnel and materiel advantage and is not very prone to the kind of aggressive offensive action which can keep even a superior enemy force off balance and at bay.

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